

Stuffed Curried Squash, Butternut Soup, Pumpkin-Pecan Bread & Pumpkin Flan



Just as the foliage changes from shades of green to burnished oranges, reds, golds, and browns, so does the harvest define the palate of autumn. Fall is the peak season for winter squash and pumpkins.

Winter squash are distinguished from summer squash by the fact that they ripen later, have fully developed seeds, and are covered with hard skins or shells. The deep yellow to orange flesh is firmer than that of summer squash and requires longer cooking. Once the squash are cooked, the hard shells offer some interesting serving possibilities; they're ideal for holding a number of different fillings. Choose squash that are heavy for their size and have a hard, deep-colored rind free of blemishes or moldy spots.

Winter squash does not require refrigeration and can be kept in a cool, dark place for a month or more, depending on the variety. They're a good source of iron, riboflavin, and vitamins A and C.

Each year, pumpkins decorate yards and porches, signaling that the holidays are just around the corner. Inside each plump, brightly colored shell lies the beginning of tempting sweet treats! Large, round, and orange, the pumpkin is a member of the gourd family. Its flesh has a mild, sweet flavor. Choose pumpkins that are free from blemishes and heavy for their size. Store whole pumpkins at room temperature for up to a month or refrigerate up to 3 months. To prepare a fresh pumpkin for cooking, start by slicing it in half crosswise. Place the halves, cut side down, on a baking sheet. Bake at 325 degrees for 45 minutes or until fork tender. When it's cool, the pumpkin can be peeled and the pulp mashed. A 5-pound pumpkin will yield about 4-1/2 to 5 cups of cooked, mashed pulp. Pumpkin is a good source of vitamin A and may be prepared in almost any way suitable for winter squash.

As the days grow shorter and the weather grows colder the following dishes possess a sustaining heartiness that's particularly welcome, thanks to these 2 key ingredients, each of which captures the heartwarming glow of the autumn months.

Stuffed Curried Squash

3 medium acorn squash
1/4 teaspoon pepper
1/2 teaspoon curry powder
1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1 cup chopped onion
1 chopped green pepper
1 cup chopped celery
1 cup sliced fresh mushrooms
3 tablespoons butter, melted

Golden Globes

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3 cups chopped, cooked ham
1 cup sliced ripe olives
2 tablespoons chopped walnuts

Cut squash in half lengthwise, and remove seeds. Place cut side down in a shallow baking dish, and pour in boiling water 1/2- inch deep. Cover and bake at 400 degrees for 45 minutes or until squash is tender; drain. Cool squash slightly; remove pulp, leaving a firm shell. Mash pulp with pepper, curry powder, and nutmeg; set aside. Saute onion, green pepper, celery, and mushrooms in butter until vegetables are crisptender. Stir in ham, sliced ripe olives, and seasoned squash pulp; cook until thoroughly heated. Spoon mixture into squash shells; sprinkle with chopped walnuts. Cover and bake at 350 degrees for 20 minutes. Serves 6.

Butternut Soup

2 tablespoons butter
2 medium butternut squash, peeled and cut into pieces
2 medium onions, sliced
1 quart chicken stock
2 green apples, peeled and sliced
1 teaspoon salt
Black pepper, to taste
1/2 teaspoon powdered ginger
1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1/4 teaspoon paprika
1 cup cream
Chopped parsley

Melt butter in a large saucepan and saute the squash and onions until golden brown. Add chicken stock and apples and heat to the boiling point. Reduce heat, cover and simmer for 30 minutes until soft. Remove from heat, and puree in a food processor. Return to saucepan. Add salt, pepper, ginger, nutmeg, paprika, and cream, and heat until warmed through over low heat. Sprinkle with chopped parsley before serving. Serves 8.

Pumpkin-Pecan Bread

3 cups sugar
1 cup vegetable oil
4 eggs
2 cups, cooked and mashed fresh pumpkin or 1 (15-ounce) can pumpkin
2/3 cup water
3-1/3 cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking soda
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 teaspoon ground nutmeg
2 cups chopped pecans

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour two loaf pans. Mix sugar and oil with mixer in a large mixing bowl. Add eggs and blend. Add pumpkin and blend. Add water and blend. Combine remaining ingredients and add slowly. Fill pans equally and bake for 1 hour and 15 minutes or until golden brown. Makes 2 loaves.

Pumpkin Flan

1 cup sugar, divided
2- 1/2 cups milk
3 large eggs
3 egg whites
1 cup, cooked and mashed fresh pumpkin or canned pumpkin
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/4 cup flaked coconut

Sprinkle 1/2 cup sugar in a 9-inch round cake pan. Cook over medium-high heat, shaking pan occasionally, using oven mitts, until sugar melts and turns light golden; set aside. (Mixture may crack slightly as it cools.) Heat milk and remaining 1/2 cup sugar in a heavy saucepan, stirring constantly, until hot and frothy. Beat eggs, egg whites, and next 3 ingredients at medium speed with an electric mixer until blended; gradually add hot milk mixture, beating at low speed. Pour over caramelized sugar. Place cake pan in a roasting pan. Pour hot water into roasting pan to depth of 1 inch. Bake at 350 degrees for 1 hour or until a knife inserted in center comes out clean. Remove pan from water; cool on a wire rack. Cover and chill. Bake coconut in a shallow pan at 350 degrees for 5 to 6 minutes or until toasted, stirring occasionally. Cool. Loosen edges of flan with a spatula, and invert onto a serving plate, letting caramelized sugar drizzle over flan. Sprinkle with coconut. Serves 8.

The writer owns Catering by Debbi Covington and is the author of the cookbook, Dining Under the Carolina Moon. Debbi's website address is www.cateringbydebbicovington.com . She may be reached at 525-0350 or by email at covingtoncats@embarqmail.com.